

in

grand desplaisir que je saurois avoir en ce monde, c'est

The last sentence protests too much; and it was well for Ronsard through the next two centuries that the dead are deaf. For the history of his reputation is one of the most curious episodes in the annals of poetry, and one of the most ridiculous in the annals of criticism. In his lifetime Marguerite of Savoy had told Charles DC he was lucky to have at his Court one who was the first man of his age; at his death in 1585 L'Estoile wrote that 'the first and the last of French poets' had passed away. The

younger generation had indeed knocked at his door, headed by Philippe Desportes; yet not very formidably.

But the Devil's Advocate appeared with Malherbe (1555-1628) who regarded Ronsard's style as not even French.

The story is well known of someone finding Malherbe's

copy of Ronsard and remarking that he had
at all events

not struck out some of the lines—
whereupon Malherbe

forthwith struck them out too. For Chapelain
(1595-1674)

Ronsard is still a born poet, but 'sans art'—a mason. not

an architect, in the house of poetry; for
Balzac (1594-

1654) he is still a considerable stream, but
Tordure em-

pfche de couler Feau'. Then the severity
increases. La

Fontaine (1621-95) calls him 'dur, sans choix, sans gout':

Arnauld (1612-94) speaks of his 'pitoyables poésies'.

Bray&re and Fenelon are less crushing—

Ronsard, they
feel, had genuine enthusiasm, but he tried to
do too much
at once to the French language. But the
general attitude
of the eighteenth century became utter
contempt. 'Il gata
la langue', growled Voltaire; 'he is
unreadable', echoes
La Harpe; '*au nom de Ronsard', says
Marmontel more
elaborately, 'on croit voir fuir les Graces, et
surtout les
graces anacreontiques'. Chenier tried to do
again what
Ronsard had done, but the guillotine put an
end to that.